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THE GROWTH OF SOCIALIST OPINION

IN GREAT BRITAIN AND ITS
REACTION UPON PUBLIC POLICY

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED TO THE
SCOTTISH SOCIETY OF ECONOMISTS
ON THURSDAY, 17TH NOVEMBER, 1921

BY

G. W. CURRIE

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PAST PRESIDENT



London

NISBET & CO. LTD.

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PREFACE

A SOCIETY which exists for the study of political economy finds it easy to speculate upon political issues in a detached way. Reaction against the lop-sided development and distribution of nineteenth century industrial prosperity is by no means exhausted. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, and the narrow legalism which persecuted early trades unionists, decades after fears of French revolutions had ceased to afford a pretext, much less a reason, laid the foundation of a Labour movement. For long it posed as Conservatism; unmasked by d'Israeli, it tabernacled with a varying degree of comfort in the "great houses" of commercial Whiggery. It now owns and occupies palatial premises of its own not unworthy of the dividends of its golden age.

Twenty short years ago sweating—naked and unashamed—was rampant in this country: the third generation of the industrial slum-dweller is entitled to resent, even with vehemence, his physical surroundings. It helps little to remind oneself that, at other times and in other places, things have been, or may still be, worse.

The Bishops cry out for "a fundamental change." Disciples of Westcott and Gore are driven wholesale

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over towards the Labour position. So unrevolutionary—and great—an authority as Professor Nicholson writes contemptuously of “so-called capitalism” and the discontent due to recent abuses.

The problem is less one of speculation than of action. The Universities have opened their outer courts to the slum-dweller; the sympathy of the Church and the bias of the law are alike gone.

If the captain loses control, the owners cannot complain if others, whose familiarity with the good ship does not extend to the instruments of scientific navigation, proceed to hold committee meetings on the bridge. The cargo may be insured; but what about the next voyage?

G. W. CURRIE.

LONDON,
February, 1922.

THE GROWTH OF SOCIALIST OPINION IN GREAT BRITAIN AND ITS REACTION UPON PUBLIC POLICY

IN a country where the standing and steady influences of tradition have throughout its history so markedly prevailed as they have in Great Britain, the emergence of a large and organised body of opinion as a political force challenges scrutiny. Whether Socialism in this country as a political force is entitled to be described as large and whether and how far its dispositions are entitled to rank as an organisation, are questions which individuals must answer for themselves; but there will, I think, be little disagreement concerning the point of fact that we have with us now in our national life a force which may be of a loosely organised kind, and whose numbers are as yet uncounted, but which calls itself Socialism, and whose influence cannot be left out of account in the settlement of public policy.

For what may, for convenience' sake, be described loosely as political purposes, Socialism is, perhaps, more of a temper or temperament than anything

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else, and a little later it may be necessary to touch upon its political aspects. In the first place it is desired rather to trace its origin and growth, to reduce its claims and programme to a stateable and measurable form, and to consider its achievements down to date. I say "trace its origin," and it is well not to lose sight of the claim lodged for the Socialist cause that its origins are to be found in the most ancient literatures, and that its spirit is, according to the testimony of certain accepted leaders of religious thought, essentially that of Christianity. Indeed, if one takes up such a quite modern treatise as the "Greek Political Theory"¹ of Mr. Barker, of New College, one sees easily enough how much the average better-class Labour politician seeks to derive from Plato ideas on communism, education, and the rights and wrongs of property, though it is surprising that so little stress is laid upon the rejection of so much from the same source, and more surprising still how little grasp is taken of the fact that Plato's Republic was a speculation, whereas the East Ends of Newcastle and Liverpool are, unfortunately, facts. There was once a text-book famous in its day, called "French in Six Months." An age enlightened by Mr. Pelman has no doubt improved upon all this, realising that time is money. It would be ungenerous to deride the attempt of Labour to relate its policies to classical origins. Generosity apart, it is unwise; but one cannot help wishing that the Labour Party, instead of making short cuts of its own, would be content to accept the Bishop of Manchester's way of putting it.

¹ Williams & Norgate. 1915.

THE NEW MANCHESTER SCHOOL

¹ "Politics for Plato becomes . . . entirely subordinate to ethics. The State is to be so fashioned that the influence of its organisation may create in the souls of its individual citizens that habit and proportion which is profitable for eternity. It is quite true that in the details of his political organisation Plato seems entirely to sacrifice the individual to society ; but this, after all, is in the end for the individual's own good . . ." When the Bishop moves Socialist resolutions in Hyde Park he has no hesitation in sharpening the distinction this passage points to between "profit for eternity" and next year's dividend ; but even in the Hall of Christ Church he makes himself quite plain. "The true criterion of a constitution is to be found by asking what training for eternity it affords. To make the matter clear, we may at this point contrast the view of Aristotle, who believed in the eternity of spirit but not in individual immortality. The result is that for him there is nothing beyond the life of society by which that life itself is to be judged. The test of a Constitution would seem to be its stability and capacity for resisting change ; while the ideal life for man is something not socially serviceable in any high degree, so that ethics and politics fall right apart. Aristotle seems to care more for the individual because he cares more for the individual's temporal concerns and freedom ; but inasmuch as he prefers the good citizen to the good man when these two ideals fall apart, it is clear that for him the State

¹ "Plato and Christianity," by William Temple, D.D. Macmillan. 1916.

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comes first and the individual second; while, in Plato, the individual as an eternal soul comes first, and it is only his temporal concerns that are sacrificed to the State—this sacrifice itself being demanded for the sake of the individual's eternal welfare . . .” (p. 33). “So Plato,” concludes the Bishop, “leaves us at the last strangely cold. We do not wish to live in his Ideal State; it would be dull and mechanical. We do wish to feel the emotions of pity and tenderness which he regards as weakness. His absolute morality is in the end repellent, . . .” (p. 74).

I make no apology for laying some little stress upon the extent to which speakers for Labour find their material in and take their stand upon the writings of such teachers as Mr. Barker and Bishop Temple. Their eminence as teachers judged by any test is not in question; one can but wish that their teaching was studied a great deal more fully. Partial study is better than no study at all, but it has great dangers. I do not see any attempt on the part of the Labour Party to deal with the position in the commonwealth assigned by Plato to trade and money-making. And similarly with much more definitely religious teaching. The writings of Westcott, Gore and Scott Holland are mines in which Labour delves deeply. Dr. Gore in particular lends himself to quotation. Speaking of the Sermon on the Mount¹ as the Social Law, he says (p. 110): “You cannot take the maxim, . . . ‘If a man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also,’ and make it obligatory on Christians as a rule of external conduct, without upsetting the whole basis of society

¹ “The Sermon on the Mount,” by Charles Gore, D.D. John Murray. 1916.

and without ignoring a contrary maxim which we had given us in another connexion." In another place ("S. M." 183) referring to the maxim that the service which we expect from others we are to see that we render in some real sense to them, he emphasises the view that "this maxim is not inconsistent with inequality of position or (within limits) of wealth—for men are differently constituted in their capacities and wants—but it does demand equality of consideration." In addresses to Labour audiences such as that at Bradford in September of this year (1921), Bishop Gore leaves no doubt of his teaching that unbridled competition is fundamentally impermissible to a Christian State, and equally so to a Christian individual. This is not a view or particular aspect of his teaching, for the occasional consumption of a Trades Congress. In his famous "Manual of Membership," called "The Religion of the Church,"¹ he confesses that (p. 190) "on the whole Christian States, so called, have given but a very disappointing picture of the social application of Christian principles. Especially in recent history they have too readily acquiesced in a political economy, really anti-Christian in principle, which by substituting unrestrained competition for co-operation has undermined the very basis of fellowship." The late Bishop of Oxford has never hesitated to point out to Labour audiences how the responsibility for such social failure is one that no class, however numerous in the community, can be discharged of; and warns all who place their faith in violence that revolutions are the great disappointments of history.

¹ "The Religion of the Church," by Charles Gore, D.D., Mowbray. 1916.

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There is a difference between positive support and mere countenance, and it cannot be argued that the Church of England as an undivided whole would deliberately endorse the teaching on Labour of Westcott, Gore and Scott Holland ; but the more one emphasises the separated nature of their position and the dividing line between their Labour doctrine and that of the bench of bishops, the more one emphasises the inroads which the former has made upon the latter.

LAMBETH AND LABOUR

We have the bishops' formal resolutions and report upon Labour problems set forth at last year's Lambeth Conference (1920). They call as witnesses authorities so divergent as Mazzini and the chairman of Cammell, Laird & Co. The first lays down that "he who can spiritualise democracy will save the world." Mr. Hichens urges that "no tinkering scheme of piecemeal reform will avail to cure our ills : the light must be let in on all dark places at once, . . ." "It has," the bishops say, "been commonly held that different individuals, different sections or interests or classes must pursue their own self-interest, and that the result of that pursuit would be the best possible condition of society as a whole. Experience has shown that this doctrine is false . . . Such a spirit is equally disastrous in the capitalist, who is determined at all costs to maintain the controlling power of capital and in the disciple of Marx who preaches 'class war,' and wishes violently to 'expropriate the expropriator.'" The bishops proceed to summarise their views. It is a "pressing

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duty of the Church to convince its members of the necessity of nothing less than a fundamental change in the spirit and working of our economic life." They emphasise "the duty which is laid upon all Christians of setting human values above dividends and profits in their conduct of business," and a good deal more to the same effect. The Lambeth Conference is really scarcely less definite than Bishop Gore; and at the lowest, its resolutions constitute a grave formal indictment of the City and the City's point of view. The leaders of the bishops to-day are removed as the poles asunder from much of the theology of Charles Kingsley, and may be admitted at once to be more skilful controversialists. But, after three-quarters of a century, and it is much to say, Kingsley is justified of his 1848 position on Labour. Many who agree as little as men can with Kingsley's general attitude are glad and grateful to admit that his position in 1848 goes far now to redeem the Church as it was then from the charge of utter carelessness of its proper responsibilities towards Labour problems.

THE CHARTER AND THE CHURCH

At a time when the Church and the law courts conspired with the legislature to treat a trade unionist as a bad citizen and an evil conspirator, Kingsley, to his honour, had the courage to stand up for the claims of the Chartists. It is amazing to recall what the famous six points really were: Adult Male Suffrage, the Ballot, Annual Parliaments, Payment of Members, Equal Electoral Districts, and the Abolition of Property Qualification. Except Annual Parliaments, the whole six of them are our accepted

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political practice. The so-called Socialism of yesterday becomes the accepted Conservatism of to-day. Kingsley was certainly not a Socialist in the sense that Bishop Gore certainly is, and that Scott Holland was, and he did not approve of the *methods* of the Chartists. The document itself he thought very defective indeed, and he said so. "Will the Charter" ("Life," p. 63) "make you free? Will it free you from slavery to ten-pound bribes? Slavery to beer and gin? Slavery to every spouter who flatters your self-conceit? That I guess is real slavery" . . . "Friends, you want more than Acts of Parliament can give," and again, quoting from Parson Lot's Letters, "Do you fancy that after a whole column spent in stirring men up to fury, a few twaddling copy-book headings about 'the sacred duty of order' will lay the storm again?" Kingsley was certainly not always so guarded in his language: he was extraordinarily mixed in his line of practical advice to his humble friends; Leslie Stephen's gentle gibe as to the process of modification so evident in Kingsley's later views as compared with his earlier tone representing a change in the spectator rather than in the spectacle is justified. But my point here is really this—that you find common ground between Bishop Gore the high churchman, Kingsley the low and broad churchman, and the whole bench of bishops as now constituted in a profound dislike, distrust and contempt for a social system which, in their view, ranges itself definitely against Christian doctrine and is an offence against human justice.

I make no apology whatsoever for setting forth as fully as the brief space at my disposal warrants the

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views expressed by churchmen. The commonest criticism levelled against Socialist doctrine is that it runs altogether *counter* to Christian teaching. That some Socialists are frankly atheists, subversive citizens and generally wholly ungodly is perfectly true. The point is that churchmen of all sorts and those who would most emphatically repudiate the Church and all its ways do, to a large extent, join hands in denouncing as insufficient for the service of the world the arrangements for much of the world's business which are in force. In a brief review of the influences which have moulded the growth of Socialist opinion in this country, I do not hesitate to say that the most powerful of them all has been religious teaching and criticism. The criticism has, naturally, been of a negative type; it has often influenced items of legislation, but it has not placed at our disposal in the name of the Church even a suggested systematic body of legislation; and within the Church itself it is probably true that no little share of the forces which have urged the Church so far in the direction of the expression of Socialist opinion reflects not so much any kind of conviction that any system of Socialism is practicable or desirable, as a strong, natural and not discreditable dislike of the grossly unfair conditions of actual life to which large numbers of our fellow citizens have for generations been condemned. I will only add at this stage the single remark that this reflection is intended to convey the suggestion that attempts to alleviate these conditions apart from the employment of the machinery of Socialism, might reasonably be expected to attract support from equally varied quarters.

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FRENCH IDEALISM AND ENGLISH PRACTICE

It will be convenient now to consider the more definite origins of Socialist impulse in Britain. 1848 is, perhaps, the critical year, but it can only be understood in the light of the half-century leading up to it. The names which stand out most prominently from these quite early days are Saint-Simon the Frenchman, and Robert Owen, of New Lanark. Both were men of original temperament, but neither of them can possibly be described as violent.

Saint-Simon was a French aristocrat. He was born in 1760 and died in 1825. As a boy of nineteen he fought for the American Colonists against us. As a young man he served a useful apprenticeship for a Socialist by enriching himself through land speculation, but subsequently managed to dissipate his money, thereafter living poor and dying in great straits.¹ Thomas Kirkup, the sympathetic historian of Socialism, says frankly that "as a thinker Saint-Simon was entirely deficient in system, clearness and consecutive strength, and it is a little difficult to account for his influence which during his own lifetime was quite limited." What he desired—to quote Kirkup—was "an industrialist State directed by modern science," and he made his first appeal direct to King Louis XVIII. He took for granted, to begin with, that his industrial chiefs would be as moral as Plato's philosopher-kings, and would rule in the interest of society. His principal book—the "New Christianity"—elevated the cause of the poor into a religious faith. As Kirkup puts it, "Saint-

¹ "A History of Socialism," by Thomas Kirkup. 5th Edition, revised by E. R. Pease. Black. 1913.

Simon propounds as the comprehensive formula of the New Christianity this precept—The whole of society ought to strive towards the amelioration of the moral and physical existence of the poorest class: Society ought to organise itself in the way best adapted for attaining this end.” Saint-Simon’s followers very soon modified their view of the “industrial chief,” and of the *rôle* to which he was entitled. But he did foresee the fact that a new type of industrial chief was to arise and the industrial centralisation on which he was to take his stand.

Saint-Simon stood for centralised authority in Socialism, which Fourier tried to break down. Fourier’s father was a draper, and trained his son to be a commercial traveller. When five years old he was punished for speaking the truth about some of the goods in the paternal establishment; and, while still pursuing his commercial travels, had to superintend the deliberate destruction of rice to prevent its being used to break the market price during a time of scarcity. His schemes were fantastic to a degree, and “for the last ten years of his life he waited in his apartments at noon every day for the wealthy capitalist who should supply the means” for their realisation (Kirkup). Proudhon was a much more practical man. He was essentially a man with a patient mind and discarded the hopelessly optimistic views of Saint-Simon and Fourier. But, if patient, he was in aim revolutionary. The paradox “Property is theft” is his. He was an early Marxian, and Kirkup’s defence of him is worth quoting: “As slavery is assassination inasmuch as it destroys all that is valuable and desirable in human personality, so property is theft inasmuch as it appropriates the

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value produced by the labour of others in the form of rent, interest or profit without rendering an equivalent ” ; and I fancy few of us would care to deny that the rights of property are capable of abuse so gross as to be criminal.

The main interest to me in thus tracing early French Socialism is not so much its influence on British Socialism as its contrast with it. Robert Owen must have been a gifted commercial man. He left a Welsh village school at nine, and at nineteen he was manager of a large mill in Manchester, where the first cotton from the Southern States was used. He fell in love with and married the daughter of a Glasgow spinner, a Mr. Dale, and persuaded his Manchester partners to acquire control of the New Lanark Mills started by Dale and Arkwright on the Falls of Clyde. He introduced all sorts of benevolent schemes to mitigate the lot of the workmen—hundreds of whom were children aged five, six and seven obtained from poor-houses in Edinburgh and Glasgow. He was a practical philanthropist and a thoroughly successful man of business. He made his open declaration of Socialism in 1817 when he was forty-six and in enjoyment of a well and widely-established reputation. *The Times* and other leading organs of opinion spoke well of him on occasion, though they ridiculed his pose as a diplomatist ; and Queen Victoria's father carried on an open friendship with him to the length of borrowing a useful trifle of hard cash. It is pleasant to read in a recently published memoir that one of the girl monarch's first acts was to pay off such obligations.

But his heart was set on moral and social reforms far more than on financial success, and he gradually

became estranged from commercial opinion. This is easily understood. In 1806 his mills were stopped for four months owing to the American embargo, and he paid his hands full wages all the time. He spent large sums of his firm's money on starting infant schools and on what would now be called welfare work. In 1816 he tried to organise opinion against the long hours worked by children in mills, and this was the last straw. His wealthy Glasgow friends disowned him and the parish minister accused him of sedition. He developed loose views on marriage, and openly derided accepted religious beliefs. His business position became impossible; he separated from his partners, settled a financial competency on each of his children, and went his own way as a propagandist. His various colonies or settlements were, of course, failures. It was his successful business life and his pioneer welfare work that gave him the money and reputation which enabled him to enter on his career as a fighting Socialist. One has nothing but contempt for the brutality of employers a hundred years ago, and it is interesting to read in the "Dictionary of National Biography" that Lord Sidmouth's Tory Government was for a while much disposed to take him up. He hated the Manchester School nearly as bitterly as did Kingsley, and subsequent events showed, and showed very shortly, that his discontent with the existing condition of industrialism was well warranted. Owen was not originally Socialist—he drifted into it, or was driven into it. His real monument is the co-operative movement, and even that only succeeded when its original lines were greatly modified. It is interesting to note that sympathy with the down-

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trodden workman did not interfere with his healthy, if old-fashioned, idea that he should work. As the "Dictionary of National Biography" puts it, "he was especially proud of a quaint arrangement for marking each man's conduct daily by a 'silent monitor,' a label coloured variously to indicate goodness and badness and placed opposite each man's post."

THE GERMAN CONTRIBUTION

In Germany we find in Marx, Engels, Lasalle and Rodbertus a much more revolutionary type of Socialist thinker.

LASALLE lived from 1825 to 1864, dying at thirty-nine.

MARX lived from 1818 to 1883, dying at sixty-five.

RODBERTUS lived from 1805 to 1875, dying at seventy.

ENGELS lived from 1820 to 1895, dying at seventy-five.

Rodbertus, indeed, was by temperament altogether opposed to participation in revolutionary *action*. He was a quiet-living lawyer and student who was confident that Socialism would prevail in the long run. His advice to German operatives was to leave parties alone and to concentrate on their economic position. A firm supporter of the monarchy, he recognised that his country was far from ready to adopt Socialism, but thought that in, say, five hundred years the time would come.

Lasalle, on the other hand, was socially a loose liver; he finally got himself killed in a duel with a

Bavarian diplomatist who did not fancy such a son-in-law, for which one can scarcely blame him. He founded the Social Democratic Party in Germany, but his own lack of judgment in action did much to neutralise his unbounded energy as an advance agent for Socialism in Europe. But this outrageous person had open allies among Roman Catholic Bishops. Marx was an infinitely greater and more effective man than any of the others. He was of good—in many ways extremely good—personal character—utterly unselfish—unbelievably industrious—and from beginning to end a revolutionary.

It is difficult to blame him for being unable to live on good terms with the sundry continental governments which expelled him one after another. Their ideas of liberty were of a type that English political instinct has invariably declined to tolerate. Further, it is necessary to bear in mind that the condition of the operative classes in England at the time when Marx and Engels were consolidating their views was deplorably low in many ways. Mr. Kirkup has a sentence which is worth quoting: "The great task of the Marx school is not to preach a new economic and social gospel, not to provide ready-made schemes of social regeneration after the fashion of the early Socialists, nor to counteract by alleviating measures the wretchedness of our present system; but to explain and promote the inevitable process of social evolution so that the domination of capital may run its course and give place to the higher system that is to come." According to this view of Marxian doctrine you have only to play the Capital game right out to the end according to its own rules to find yourself living in a state of Socialism. The

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régime of Capital carries within itself the germ of its own inevitable destruction. Meantime, well affected citizens may as well forward the good work. This process or interpretation is verily a pouring of new wine into old bottles.

D'ISRAELI AND THE FACTS OF THE CASE

It is curious to recall that Engels' book, "The Condition of the Working Class in England" was published in the same year as D'Israeli's "Sybil." The great conservative points out the existence of two Englands—"two nations, the rich and the poor, between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy, who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners and are *not* governed by the same laws." He describes the dwellings of the nation called the poor as "gutters of abomination, piles of foulness, stagnant pools of filth, reservoirs of leprosy and plague," and Engels said much the same thing so far as he dealt with facts and circumstances. Now, it will, I think, be agreed that obsession by resentment against injustice is an unsafe light to steer by—an inadequate foundation for a social philosophy. Marx never rose above the conviction that the employment of capital according to existing practice must at all times, in all places and in all circumstances involve robbery; but it is quite untrue—ridiculously untrue—to say that he denied or even belittled the necessity for capital in production. In spite of all his bias and

crudeness, Marx's grasp of the fact that Socialism would come to depend for its effectiveness upon an international working basis was a great contribution to political thought. Much of Marx's attack upon the abuses of Capitalism and his exposures of its frequent immorality seem to me not without warrant—much of it is D'Israeli's vitriol without D'Israeli's balance, and the absence of the latter makes a great difference. Russia shows how great, and we may be thankful that the object lesson has been given in that country and not in our own. The important thing is that it should be learned.

The manifestos hurled on the world by Marx and his colleagues treat commerce as wholly evil. Marx was a man of blameless family life. When charged with wishing to abolish the institution of the family he rounded on his accusers and pointed to the wreck of the family already accomplished by the wholesale degradation and sweating of women and the flagrant and unconcealed immorality of the divorce courts.

THE LESSON FOR LEGISLATORS

That there has been a revival of Marxism in this country is plain beyond a doubt, and the increasing degree of co-operation amongst international bankers and capitalists is one of the causes of the international character of Labour propaganda. The one leads to the other. That this revival has political significance is clear. If any are less than satisfied that this is so, let him remember that the Government of the day undertook the distribution of a text-book on the revival of Marxism, and in advance of its appearance canvassed its official sup-

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porters to read it—a process which I imagine must have done many of them a world of good. Since Professor Nicholson's work¹ was published I have not, I confess, received any further circulars from the Government on the subject, and it seems a pity that a good intention to give the public a little wholesome instruction for once should have fallen a victim perhaps to the economy craze and perhaps to something else. The author in stating the causes of the revival of Marxian doctrine premises that its "popularity . . . may be accounted for in the first place by the fact that his system holds in solution contradictory aims and methods," and regards as a further partial explanation the fact that Marxism "means very different things to different people." "The chief nominal bond of union of professing Marxists is their discontent with the system described as Capitalism, which again, like Socialism, admits of great variations of meaning." It is when the professor proceeds to deal with this question of discontent as a lever of opinion that he seems to me to read our legislators such an invaluable and badly needed lesson. He says: "This discontent with so-called Capitalism has been greatly intensified by the economic results of the war. There is a widespread belief—whether well-founded or not—that during the war and after the war capital has made and continues to make large unjustifiable gains." . . . "People in general are disturbed, not to say enraged, by the rise in prices which they ascribe as profiteering." . . . "Their idea is that if profiteering has come to stay, a social revolution is required to make it

X ¹ "The Revival of Marxism," by J. S. Nicholson, LL.D. Murray. 1920.

go." . . . " Popular feeling has been . . . excited by the fortunes made in the war and by the glaring extravagance of the new rich. The contrast between the conscription of life and the licence allowed to capital has aroused a feeling of moral indignation or rather disgust amongst people who are little concerned about the exploitation of Labour. The "war fortune" is certainly one of the chief contributory causes of the revival of Marxism. From this point of view it is unfortunate that the special taxation of war fortunes is considered to be impracticable."

The gravamen of such incisive criticism is intensified by its close juxtaposition to an exposure of the inadequacy of Marx's data, and of his spurious reasoning and fallacious theories. Professor Nicholson goes so far as to say "in conclusion" that "stress may once more be laid on the social effects of the profiteering during the war and arising out of the war. The master of the house has been, he says, afraid to fire on the robbers lest he should injure honest folk by accident or by panic. It ought not to have been beyond the resources of civilisation to isolate the 'war profiteers.' The glaring injustice of taxing during the war the incomes of family trusts—of widows and orphans and the like—at a higher rate as being 'unearned,' and allowing the 'unearned' war fortunes to escape differential taxation will not readily be forgotten."

The trade débâcle of 1921 followed hard upon the Professor's treatise, and a considerable portion of the illgotten gains have gone the appointed way. Those who have escaped claim credit for the vicarious

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sacrifice of their neighbours—with what justice every one must judge for himself. Unfortunately, the Socialist is so obtuse, and indeed spiteful, as to regard such losses as so much more evidence of instability in the fabric of competitive commerce.

I agree without reservation, if I may respectfully say so, with our founder's view that there are in the present state of things conditions favourable to an outburst of Marxism. It is, as he says, "in vain for the economist to show that analytically and historically Marxism is fallacious as a system, if conditions are allowed to arise and continue which seem to confirm the system. . . . The disease must be checked by destroying the conditions favourable to its growth."

Now, the lesson to be learned from this is that nothing is so infectious as the sincerity of the fanatic. Marx's obsession against the injustices inflicted on the working class in all countries carried him entirely off his feet, and it does exactly the same thing to those to whom it is communicated. It says a good deal, in my judgment, for the soundness of political instinct in this country that, while so much of the indictment brought by Marx and Engels against industrialism as it was fifty, sixty and seventy years ago simply cannot be gainsaid, and was indeed actually endorsed by D'Israeli, his methods should have recommended themselves so little. How far Marx would have modified his social prescriptions for Great Britain had we adopted adult suffrage in his time is, of course, a speculation. It does appear to me to be maintainable that the modification of method might well have been fundamental.

THE ENGLISH MOVEMENT ITSELF

The more modern English influences regarding which I wish to say something are those of :—

COBBETT (1762—1835)

SPENCER (1820—1903)

MILL (1806—1873)

T. H. GREEN (1836—1882)

SIDNEY WEBB

As a youth Cobbett enlisted in the army, served overseas and was honourably discharged. In 1810 he was prosecuted and imprisoned (and thereby ruined) for the offence of writing an article denouncing military flogging and in 1817 he fled to America for fear of further incarceration. In 1831 he was prosecuted for his support of the Reform agitation ; but, acting as his own counsel, he defended himself successfully against charges of sedition. The “ Dictionary of National Biography ” sums up Cobbett as follows : “ His views of politics and history were crude and his economic theories often absurd. But he showed a genuine and ardent interest in the welfare of the poor . . . and in many ways . . . anticipated the doctrine of the Young England Party as led by D’Israeli.” Leslie Stephen goes so far in one of his essays as to enter an argument for the view that Cobbett’s influence was actually conservative.

SPENCER AND INDIVIDUALISM

Of Herbert Spencer, who died, and for twenty years had lived, politically in the Conservative camp, it is, I imagine, commonly forgotten that he was not only a member but an office-bearer of the Chartists in 1848, at a time, too, when he drew a much-needed

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salary as a sub-editor of the *Economist*. Some of the Chartists were sadly respectable, and an argument in Social Statics for the right to refuse to pay taxes on pain of surrendering the protection of the State represents Spencer's theory at its most revolutionary temperature. The extraordinary influence he once enjoyed amongst his contemporaries is quite obsolete, and it is now scarcely possible to think that he was once a Chartist secretary and regarded as a Socialist.

It is, I think, not too much to say that his conception of individualism is in these later days so little in accordance with accepted views as to operate as a condemnation of his own teaching and a positive stimulus in the opposite direction. Protests against poor relief in certain forms one can perhaps understand, but protests against public sanitation on the ground that it is an interference with a fore-ordained struggle for the survival of the fittest one cannot. Once this point of view is fairly grasped, Spencer's objection to such dangerous lapses from political wisdom as the mint, the lighthouse service, and even the post office, become intelligible, and his less strongly pressed objections to state-aided emigration and the provision of education are almost taken for granted. His conception of freedom all round led him to deny the validity of the right to private property in land and to regard as ideal the ultimate disappearance of the family as an organisation and foundation of social discipline.

THE PLACE OF MILL

I have said that 1848 may be regarded as the critical year, and in it was published John Stuart Mill's

“Political Economy.” It is somewhat difficult to place Mill as a socialist. In his autobiography he accepts (p. 231) the term as his “general designation.”

As Leslie Stephen says (“Dictionary of National Biography”): “If he appears to the modern Socialist as a follower of Ricardo, he would have been regarded by Ricardo’s disciples as a Socialist.” The important thing to remember when one seeks to learn of Mill how industry should be organised may be given in his own words (“Political Economy,” People’s Edition, p. 465): “The form of association, however, which if mankind continue to improve must be expected in the end to predominate, is not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief and workpeople without a voice in the management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations and working under managers elected and removable by themselves.” One has only to recall Mill’s electioneering campaigns at Westminster to be reminded that he entertained at no time any hallucinations as to the contemporary moral level of the operative classes. Parliamentary reform seemed to him desirable notwithstanding his contempt for voters; he urged it for many reasons including the flattering one that of the “few points on which the English as a people are entitled to the moral pre-eminence with which they are accustomed to compliment themselves at the expense of other nations, the one of greatest importance is that the higher classes do not lie; and the lower, though mostly habitual liars, are ashamed of lying” (“Dissertations and Discussions,” Vol. III.,

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p. 24). He had a natural antipathy to wild methods of every kind ; he joined debating clubs, but founded no wild-cat colonies ; he saw quite clearly what was coming.

Not only so, but, perhaps undesignedly, he did much to pave the way for it. He preached the doctrine that " Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals " (" Utilitarianism," p. 21).

THE GOLDEN AGE

He had all an optimist's belief that a golden age lay ahead, not behind, and that it would develop and evolve. And with all his love of individual liberty, he was prepared to use the power of the State to hasten its advent. He was all for compulsory education and plenty of it, State control of women and children's hours of labour, and, in a less degree, of colonisation. But his real contribution towards the Socialist impulse lay in his treatment of problems of distribution. Mill was never a Socialist—or anything like a Socialist—in the sense of holding any belief that competition would or should be eliminated. The mere *lex talionis*—the competition of tigers in a jungle—he would not support ; but anything like positive and large scale repression of competitive production he did not advocate. Co-operative distribution was with him quite another story. Here he was to all intents and purposes a Socialist. Mill lived to see the Education Act carried. He was not prepared to admit that all our boasted mechanical inventions had lightened the day's toil of a single

human being ; he believed that the capacity of the democratic masses to profit by them, or in any other way, turned largely, if not wholly, upon education and its disciplinary effects. He preached this doctrine long before Lord Haldane, and large as was his fund of patience and faith, he would have required it all had he been spared to look back upon fifty years of education. There is no reason to think, at least so I believe, that all its shortcomings would have diminished in any degree his faith in education as the one thing needful. Mill was a utilitarian, but on vastly wider lines than Bentham. He had a great sense of the use of historical continuity, which Bentham certainly did not.

But Mill, in turn, gave place to a man who was at once more practical and more of an idealist—a believer in “that only valid idealism which trusts not to a guess about what is beyond experience, but an analysis of what is within it.” T. H. Green was never unwilling to admit that Mill and his utilitarianism had been for political good however little he liked the utilitarian motive. The fact that he placed himself directly in touch with the discussion of the actual political issues of his day makes the study of Green most repaying. In him we see the abstract and the concrete set forth side by side. When he joined the United Kingdom Alliance in 1872 he set up a coffee-stall in the street. He held strong views as to what was due to middle-class boys in the way of education, and he proceeded to put a considerable sum of money into the foundation of a day school at Oxford. His doctrine was that character could best develop in an atmosphere of service and he got himself elected to Oxford Town Council. To

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understand Green is to realise how partial and unequal was some of Mill's teaching, and how completely—one is tempted to say miserably—Spencer failed to interpret and apply his own views. Green adopts as his own that "the effectual action of the State . . . seems necessarily to be confined to the removal of obstacles." This sounds barren enough ; but then we find that the State is to stick at nothing to expedite the process of removal. Education is to be compulsory ; Green cannot away with any sort of vested right in ignorance. Drunkenness he saw to be evil—it was an obstacle to freedom of the ✓ overworked, the untaught, and the ill-housed—*ergo*—gin shops must be disciplined. He has done as much as any man—alive or dead—to kill the immoral fallacy that "a man can do as he likes with his own," but he is a firm defender not only of private property in capital but of inequality in such ownership.

GREEN AND THE LANDLESS MAN

But concerning one kind of property he had grave misgivings. "Landless countrymen whose ancestors were serfs are," he says, "the parents of the proletariat of great towns." He dislikes the legal and practical fetters attached to the land ; and in the light of subsequent events his views as to land reform are of great interest. He was opposed to the seizure of unearned increment as calculated to decrease efficiency. He wished to rely rather upon public control and believed the thing to aim at is "a class of small proprietors tilling their own land." That ✓ was to be the "mainstay of social order and contentment." It is impossible to describe Green as a

Socialist. By this I do not mean that he countenanced private property and regarded social order and contentment as desirable—many Socialists do all that. It is impossible to regard him as a Conservative—though many of his aims were conservative in the best sense and he never failed to relate his schemes to national characteristics and sentiment. He was, as a matter of fact, actively attached to the political radicalism of his own youth. Green had a practical habit of mind but was first and last an idealist seeking for righteousness. To him, acquiescence in the second best or less was the real apostasy—the real failure—the real disgrace. Mill's views and Green's also regarding land both appear to me to leave unduly out of account the extent to which land in this country is a manufactured article. Indeed, Mill failed entirely to foresee even the possibility that the market value of land might develop a tendency towards depreciation.

THE WEBBS

There remains on my brief list the name of Sidney Webb. The extent to which the doctrine of social control of values created by social action has spread in this country is largely Sidney Webb's work. Briefly the Fabian aim is the reorganisation of society in such a way as to give to the community a large measure of ownership and control of both land and capital. The Fabian Society believes that pressure of circumstances will, inevitably if slowly, bring this reorganisation about. This reorganisation, in its view, will eliminate much waste, inequality and oppression which are seen to accompany the capitalist system under its present control.

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Marx and Sidney Webb alike owe a position of ascendancy each in his own day to complete devotion to the cause of Socialism. For the greater part Marx, in spite of the revival, is obsolete ; that is to say, the facts on which he built have very largely passed away, and the balance of political power has shifted. The wholesale hostility of many Marxian disciples to religion and their attitude towards marriage and the family discredit them. Their willingness to destroy existing institutions without considering how they are to be replaced challenges the whole weight of static conservatism. So far from relieving its followers, much less the community from their chains, Marxism in practice appears more likely to enslave its devotees more mercilessly than ever. Fabianism is wiser in its generation. Convinced that the amount of error embedded in the whole structure of the capitalist society is bound to eventuate in change out of all recognition, it bides its time. It takes the line quite deliberately that the competitive capitalist system will demonstrate both to others and to itself how and where it is deficient more convincingly than its critics. It has always prophesied that abuse of control would lead to loss of control, that excessive disregard for personal rights would bring its own Nemesis, and that idolatry of dividends would disappoint its votaries. The actual erection of the golden calf in the industrial era was, it may be said, the work of the rich : the concrete foundation on which it was rested was the materialistic ignorance of the multitude. " One built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar." But the giving or the withholding of the worship, which is, after all, what

counts, has never lain with the calf ; that was, and is, the business of the multitude. It is idle to deny—palpably idle—that the present state of the world is not without elements of confirmation of the validity of these criticisms. The unfortunate thing is that—even assuming them to be perfectly true—they are really of so negative a character. The great want of society to-day is not analysis and disintegration—it is more and better synthesis ; and its great danger lies in the gap between them.

That there has been, at one time on the initiative of one political party and again on that of another, a constant succession of legislation in the realm now of industry and now of finance embodying ideas which are certainly Socialistic in the sense that they rest upon an increased degree of associated action and responsibility is not matter of debate.

The whole of the factory acts, the compensation acts, the franchise acts, the education acts, the whole of the insurance acts and those relating to trades unions and co-operation are Socialistic in this sense. But they are not Socialistic in the other sense—the sense, that is, of seeking to *eliminate* the rub of one trader against another.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES INVOLVED

I have said little in this paper about local government which, in a sense, rests upon and, as it were, depends from legislation in a modern State. In my view, the tendency of Westminster and Whitehall to evade awkward questions by turning them over to the nearest town clerk or county court judge is one which requires to be kept under strict observa-

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tion. The process is justified, we all know, on the plea of decentralisation, devolution, congestion, or what not ; and where administration and its reasonable elasticity and conformity to local circumstance are at stake it is probably all to the good. At all events, and this is really why I refer to the matter, it has always seemed to me that the natural and necessary corollary of the tendency is an increased power of co-operation, both *ad hoc*, and generally, of the separate local authorities.

MR. G. D. H. COLE

It is interesting from this point of view to observe the distinct note of reservation sounded by Mr. Cole in his last published volume on "The Future of Local Government."¹ He is not to be taken as retreating from his ideals or as withdrawing his general challenge to things as they are ; and it is fair to remember that special pleading is exposed to considerable risk of misrepresenting itself. Still, Mr. Cole's view "that the majority of important productive industries and services will never and should never be nationalised in the sense in which the word is ordinarily understood . . ." but that " . . . they should be socialised in the sense that they must be transferred from private to some form of public ownership . . ." is a little significant (p. 114). Mr. Cole, arguing the merits of the regional system with which his name is a good deal associated, also tells us (p. 123) that " . . . the State is a piece of political machinery which, what-

¹ Cassell. 1921.

ever may be its other uses, is at least singularly ill-adapted " for the work of administration. His chapter on the co-operative movement and its bearing upon the management of localities gives an interesting appreciation of the modifications which its development on a nationalised and probably compulsory scale as contrasted with its existing partial, albeit large and always voluntary, basis might carry with it. The whole speculation as stated in this chapter is well worth reading. The undiluted individualist will find neither there nor elsewhere in the book any concession to his views and aims ; but he will be able to note an increased degree of rather unwilling willingness to come to terms with him over the day's work. The whole argument for the reorganisation of the State on functional lines—one might almost say in functional strait-waistcoats—is, as Mr. Cole himself says (p. 135), valid only on one condition. " There must be no such splitting up of local government functions as will serve to destroy the unity of the whole work done by the public bodies within the area concerned." I cannot, I confess, bring myself to agree with him at all in thinking that " the problem of providing this co-ordination clearly centres round the question of finance." There is a financial side to the matter, of course ; but surely the more immediately visible loose stones in Mr. Cole's elaborately reared structure lie in the hitherto uncured unwillingness of the local government elector to be bothered with his own electoral business at all. It is a little unfortunate for himself that his mind is so logical as it is. In working out his scheme of operatives' control, he concludes that the elected representatives responsible for budgeting and rating

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“would possess all powers necessary to keep the public fully informed of the manner in which the service was being administered ; but they would not interfere with the normal administration of it save on those occasions when their interference was deemed necessary because something was going definitely wrong.” Now it seems to me that the most patient ass of a ratepayer deserves a little more protection than this.

Mr. Cole is at once unwilling and unable to make much use of existing machinery and faces up to the position which his scheme would bring about quite honestly. Indeed, he glories in what will seem to many to be its shame. I suggest that this highly interesting writer has not by any means reached his final views upon local government. I anticipate, and that shortly, an attempt at a working accommodation with Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb ; and if I am asked for evidence in this direction I would refer to his chapter on “Webbismus.” We all know that Paul when he breathed forth threatenings and slaughter was well on the road to conversion. Expertise may be a good servant, but it is like to be a bad master, even when it is expert. Besides, the instinct and the training of a very considerable political experience have developed the mind and habits of the British local government elector along lines which are much more practical and less speculative than those which appeal to Mr. Cole. Nevertheless, it would not surprise me if, at some future date, he made some contribution of substantial practical value to the discussion and settlement of local government problems. The value of his present work as a stimulus to the prevailing somnolence is not inconsiderable,

and nothing could exceed the candour with which it reveals how divergent are the views which prevail regarding the organisation of local government amongst those who are as a rule lumped together and unceremoniously dismissed as mere spendthrifts of other people's money. I conclude that it is open to question whether the whole of the energy recently devoted to opposing the entrance into municipal life of all Labour candidates without distinction has been well expended. From what follows it will be seen that in my view an examination of local government in this country leads to somewhat the same results as the study of wider issues.

I have endeavoured, in short compass, to trace some of the influences which have afforded guidance to political thought and legislation, and have referred even more briefly to the legislation itself.

THE APPLICATION

In the invitation which your president and council extended to me so kindly to address you they made one suggestion, namely, that while they wished me to choose my own subject, it might be well if it were of a somewhat practical nature. It is in the application to current facts and circumstances that the practical side of such a review emerges, and I shall attempt an application. Believe me, I am not unconscious that the attempt trenches upon highly controversial matter; but, believe me also, I find it difficult to imagine that a single member of my audience has less temptation to add to the great evils and dangers of introducing into such a discussion any so-called political—by which I mean

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partisan—bias than I have myself. On the contrary, I am very deeply and permanently impressed with the conviction that for the last two generations at least no small part of the difficulty attending the consideration and solution of our economic problems has its origin in this very temptation and in the extent to which it has been given in to—if not indeed welcomed.

The truth of this criticism may be more palpable in relation to issues of a somewhat different kind, but it can scarcely, I think, be more relevant.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In an attempt to focus opinion several questions may be propounded.

(1) To what extent does the Socialistic drift in our legislation and public policy correspond to alterations in the physical resources of civilisation rather than take its origin in any evolution of opinion?

The answer which I would submit to this first question is that to a large extent increased communications, the agglomeration of labour forces in towns, and the large-scale unit of modern industrialism, gave rise directly to a great deal of it. This question is largely one of industrial mechanics, and to overlook the fact is to invite a false antithesis.

(2) To what extent does the demand, the loudness of which must be admitted though the depth of it is unplumbed, for a still further drift in the same direction represent what may be called reasoned opinion, and to what extent does it represent merely accumulated discontent amounting to passion?

The answer here, I think, must be that the dividing line is hard to draw. It is a serious thing to think that accumulated discontent has assumed such dimensions and that it appears to give rise to such passion.

The attitude of men such as Bishop Gore, Bishop Temple, and Mr. Sidney Webb cannot be dismissed as so much political passion. But the driving force behind the further demand does appear to me to rest largely upon passionate conviction of injustice. The end of this conviction is difficult to foresee. It may as well be admitted that the conditions against which Shaftesbury had to fight so hard were very grossly unjust; that the unwillingness, or at all events the slowness, with which concessions to perfectly just claims have been extorted from manufacturing employers represents, and always did represent, real injustice, and usually represented great stupidity also; that the physical conditions in which a large proportion of the wage-earning classes live is in itself utterly uneconomic, howsoever each critic may care to apportion the responsibility for it. I see no sign more reassuring than the evident connexion which exists between conditions of physical degradation, leading all too often to spiritual destruction, and the more vehement manifestations of discontent amounting to anarchy; but it is cold comfort. If the discontent were not there, the outlook would be infinitely worse. Spiritual degeneracy is many times worse than physical; but the latter is more easily discussed in terms of legislation.

(3) To what extent are the differences of view between those who are Socialists on *à priori* grounds and the out-and-out believers in unfettered competi-

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tion as the wise and only practicable working basis of a commercial civilisation reconcilable ?

The belief that the strong should on every occasion help the weak is not to be reconciled with the belief that the strong should on every occasion help themselves ; and the most one can look for is a sort of working accommodation between Bishop Gore and the typical member of the Federation of British Industries. To far too great an extent the latter quite frankly takes it for granted that nothing is so important to himself and so likely to shed blessings in the path of his neighbours as an increase of the annual dividend, *i.e.*, his own annual dividend, and a satisfactory appropriation to the reserve fund, *i.e.*, his own reserve fund ; the former will not agree to assign to dividends so exclusive a place, or indeed any very high place. The mind of the working man naturally and reasonably assigns to his own weekly dividend and to his own physical and financial reserves an importance not inferior to the interests of his master. But setting aside the street corner revolutionary whose Bolshevik doctrine has, in my view, no natural seed-ground in this country, I do think that much more opinion in common than is usually believed exists between Mr. Sidney Webb and the large and increasing number of manufacturers in this country who have for long found compensation for a dog's life with their workmen in the receipt of substantial dividends, and are beginning to grasp the fact that dividends may fail them, if they have not already done so. Adversity has its uses—even in chambers of commerce. The recent widespread failure of dividends has put many people on their inquiry. The consensus of opinion amongst

quite a number of Government commissions and inquiries into the influence of trusts and combines upon profits and prices is rather remarkable, and must be admitted, to use the popular phrase, to cut two ways. I regret I cannot enter into it now.

The view that the Labour Party in this country is, in aim and method, primarily a party of revolution is no doubt widely and sincerely held; but the evidence for it appears to me insufficient in weight and defective in character. It seems to me a mistake to look for signs of revolution—the warfare upon which the Labour Party is bent is really a campaign of attrition, not an experiment in high explosives. Its immediate effect of holding all trade and all traders up to odium as accountable for all and sundry defects in our commercial economy is undoubtedly an evil calculated to react unfavourably upon labour and unfair to the honest merchant. In my view, it is an utter mistake to act and speak as if revolution were really in question in this country. The only political revolution of which this country has had experience was conservative to the last degree.

(4) My fourth question would be as to the extent to which agreement has been reached and expressed between Socialists and individualists. The position here is really most interesting; let me illustrate. The so-called Single Tax on land was at one time a favourite political prescription at Socialist meetings; but no one has poured keener ridicule upon it than Sir Leo Money who describes it as “the strangest delusion that ever masqueraded as a gospel.”

The State ownership of coal or any approach to it

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is very commonly denounced as an idea full of menace to the national well-being and wholly inimical to the legitimate interests of capital ; but Sir Adam Nimmo and Mr. Balfour, of Sheffield, cannot be charged with harbouring—with intention at all events—hostile designs upon capital and capitalists, and we find them committed to the desirability of State acquisition. They say : “ We have carefully considered the evidence submitted to us and have come to the conclusion that the most effective method of dealing with the problem in the national interests would be for the State to acquire the ownership of the coal.” And so, more briefly, with the drink trade and the railway interest. Mr. Bonar Law, who is not in the camp of political Socialism, has never concealed his view that the element of private profit on the retail sale of drink should be completely eliminated. Mr. Churchill is on bad terms politically with Socialists, but he has expressed the view that it would be sound policy that the railways of the United Kingdom should in all the existing circumstances be taken over by the State, and their present difficulties must appeal to his sense of humour. Discussion of either drink or railways is unfortunately obscured by the circumstances that emergency legislation (notoriously largely dictated by brewers acting in perfect good faith) caused the trade in question to reap a golden harvest ; while it has now been made clear that pre-war railway dividends were partially based upon undiluted sweating. It is unreasonable to doubt the sincerity of Mr. Clynes and Mr. Thomas when they denounce the device of “ ca’ canny,” but the fact stares one in the face that a policy of restriction of output—even to the point of cessation—

has been habitually practised by capitalists and is regarded as all in the line of ordinary business. That the policy is inspired chiefly by dread of unemployment has only lately been recognised, and this is all to the good.

Considerations like these suggest that there is no necessary and sharp antithesis between Socialists and individualists as is commonly taken for granted, and that broader and sounder processes of generalisation would profoundly affect many of the deductions which serve for the foundations of much political propaganda. It is true that the danger of thinking out problems largely along the sort of historical line which I have attempted to follow to-night is that it tends to under-value new light on dark places ; but it has the advantage, on the other hand, that it helps one—one might sometimes say compels one—to argue very broadly from national characteristics to national destiny.

MAKE HASTE—HURRY SLOWLY

Attempting to do so, I conclude that the force which has in this country issued in much legislation of a Socialistic character is by no means spent ; that so far from being necessarily revolutionary it has often functioned as a preservative and conservative influence ; and that it belongs exclusively to no one party in the State, not even to that known by its name. That it is capable of dangerous abuse ; that it is exposed in a peculiar degree to the risk of attracting and relying upon men and groups of men whose weakness is not so much an unwillingness as an inability to verify theory by reference to fact, is

true. Socialists in their anxiety to secure here and now various things which may without difficulty be admitted to be desirable here and now do seem to have a difficulty in remembering that everything cannot be done at once. Their impatience and irritation is, in a measure, actually created by an unwillingness on the part of so many ever to do anything at all. The fact remains that if an express train is to get safely round a sharp curve it must go slow. A policy which would commend itself to Socialists as a progressive one would as a rule involve the expenditure, or, as they would put it, the investment of large initial amounts of hard cash. But the practicability of such a policy at a given time may depend upon quite a number of considerations other than mere willingness or unwillingness or even capacity to provide the money.

The machinery of the State can be over-oiled. It is instructive to think that Scott Holland and his friends a fortnight before the outbreak of war were planning an international conference on the Continent whose object was to take what they regarded as practical steps for the promotion of universal and international Christianity. In this way, and largely for such reasons, Socialism is also exposed to the risk of being misled by, and even of adopting, on occasion, the partial and impaired sense of moral obligation which often attaches itself to groups in action; and the higher the claims asserted for Socialism, and some of them, as I have indicated, are very high indeed, the more manifest these dangers become.

This is not to say, or to suggest for a moment, that other political parties in the State, whether acting

separately or in conjunction, can plead greater immunity from equally great difficulties and dangers, but it is a point to remember in connexion with Socialistic proposals. The political parties to which heretofore power and formal responsibility have been entrusted have of necessity had the advantage of endeavouring to exemplify the benefits and conceal the weaknesses of their position against a background of actual political life and administration. Socialism in this country has never been in their position, and for the present there are and perhaps for some time to come will be amongst its leading protagonists those whose belief it is that some of its more destructive criticism should be further proved, disproved, or modified by time and events before any formal task of government be entered upon. It is not the native ability and force of character of Labour leaders, nor is it the sense of discipline of Labour followers, which are open to question from within as well as from without : it is their stock of experience of a narrow, specialised and indispensable kind.

IN POSSESSION

It would not be difficult to instance cases in this country where office has been entrusted to governments which have been subsequently discarded on the ground that they have shown themselves possessed of inadequate experience and equipment ; but no mandate has been given to a government in modern times except upon a belief that most of its members were adequately experienced. An experienced government may receive, without undue difficulty, authority to adopt an experimental

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course ; and an untried individual may be entrusted with large responsibilities. But there does not appear to me to be any reason to anticipate that our electorate will hasten so far to depart from its practice as deliberately to elect a wholly experimental government. On this footing the prospect is that the participation of Socialism in the work of government—local and national—will not at any near date assume a direct and controlling form. It will operate as an alloy and any vocation to operate otherwise depends in all probability upon two things, the extent to which conditions of injustice calculated justly to give point to its hostile criticism of existing affairs are modified and, secondly, upon the extent to which the heretofore existing capitalist system succeeds in effecting its own restoration to a reasonably stable equilibrium. The capitalist system has all the advantage of being in possession of the industrial citadel ; but it has walls to defend and a garrison to feed.

The advantages of mobility lie with the attack.

THE MAN AND THE MACHINE

This is not the place in which to endeavour to set forth any stated idea of the part which this propelling force may play in the near or distant future. No Socialist writer with a serious reputation seeks to conceal the fact that a full development of Socialism must follow upon and cannot possibly precede large changes of moral character. To admit this is to admit that it is only as these changes become operative that Socialistic development can be contemplated. Our history seems to show that

moral and economic motives have a way of going hand in hand. Witness the abolition of legal slavery in the colonies which has been followed, at a very considerable interval, by legislation which has to a great extent abolished its practical counterpart in factories at home.

If it seems to any that in my references to Herbert Spencer I am lacking in respect for an authority which was great in its day, may I make amends by acknowledging one great truth of which he never loses grasp. No system—much less a highly organised one—will administer itself. No system can be expected to be much better than its administrators. Socialism cannot make bricks without straw; outside the covers of a hide-bound book it must come to terms with the individual, and even with the individualist. The failure of 1848 was complete; but it was not in vain. The decline of individualism for its own sake and as a political method has been noticeable in our country since about 1870 or 1880, and the growth of association both as a method and as an aim has been accomplished by a sort of peaceful penetration. Whether the process has been unduly fast or unduly slow is a question which will meet with widely varying answers; it appears, however, to be free from the reproach of having undermined the national stability.

Upon the study of political economy, its effect seems to have been to replace it in an ever-increasing degree upon the broader basis on which Adam Smith placed it and left it, but from which, it may perhaps be said, a narrowed conception of the State which prevailed in the second generation of the industrial era temporarily deflected it. Socialism as


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it has manifested itself in this country is an extremely complex and elusive force, and in the study of its bearing upon the economic problems which now press upon us so hardly a Society such as this may find no little part of its real work.



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